

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Purpose

The purpose of the Arbor Hill neighborhood planning effort was to develop consensus on strategic actions to revitalize this community in Albany, New York. The plan provides a framework for residents and investors to approach development in Arbor Hill.

The plan was developed by The Community Builders, Inc. and Behan Planning Associates, LLC, and guided by a team of residents and stakeholders comprising the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan Advisory

Committee. The committee wants Arbor Hill to become a community where people with a wider range of incomes want to live. This means meeting crucial needs for assured safety and security, leveraging the unique culture and heritage of the neighborhood, growing economic development and employment opportunities, and increasing incentives for long-term homeownership and high-quality rental housing. Momentum is critical to spurring this kind of change. To turn around the investment climate, the plan's recommendations should be implemented in a wholesale, all-inclusive manner.



Participants markup maps at a public workshop



Arbor Hill: neighborhood planning area.

### Plan Area

Located in the northeast section of the city, Arbor Hill is bordered on the north by a mix of industrial and residential uses, terminating with the I-90 highway and railroad corridors. To the south lies Sheridan Hollow which creates a natural separation between Arbor Hill and downtown Albany. To the east, I-787, a regional north-south highway, separates Arbor Hill and Albany from the Hudson River. Dense urban residential neighborhoods, beginning with West Hill, lie to the west of the neighborhood. Within the Arbor Hill community are two smaller neighborhoods, Sheridan Hollow and Ten Broeck Triangle.

## Demographics

In 2000, the City's total population was 95,658 with 5,491 persons residing in Arbor Hill. While less than 29 percent of the City's population was African American, this sector represented 77 percent of Arbor Hill's population. In 1999, the City's median household income was \$30,041, while Arbor Hill's was \$16,222.

## Process

The plan was guided by the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Advisory Committee, a body representing a variety of neighborhood stakeholders—homeowners, tenants, lenders, neighborhood associations, faith-based groups and service organizations—in conjunction with the City of Albany. Technical assistance was provided by The Community Builders, Inc., a 501(c)(3) community development organization, and Behan Planning Associates, LLC, a planning and design firm, through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and assistance from the Albany Local Development Corporation.

Broad public involvement in the planning process was afforded through an initial public meeting held in June 2002 and a hands-on design workshop held in September 2002. Members of the public also participated in the development of the plan by making comments to the Advisory Committee at its monthly meetings, and later, by serving on the four subcommittees to emerge from the planning process (described in the next section).

A final public meeting on the plan was held in June 2003 with over 100 people in attendance. Unlike previous meetings, participants' expression of frustration with ongoing neighborhood problems was tempered by their optimism that conditions in Arbor Hill could improve as a result of implementation of the plan. Further, they recognized that such change would only be possible if residents, neighborhood organizations, and City staff worked together to address the neighborhood's problems. Many meeting participants expressed their desire to help implement the plan.



About 100 people participated at the June 2003 public meeting

## Four Areas of Focus

Based on the public input obtained from the design workshop, the plan was organized

around four areas of focus: I) Homeownership and Rental Housing, II) Arts, Culture and Heritage, III) Business and Job Development, and IV) Quality of Life. Subcommittees for each of the focus areas, comprised of neighborhood advisory committee members and members of the general public, developed principles and corresponding actions. Planning consultants and staff developed budget estimates and matched actions to resources.

**Plan's Areas of Focus:**

- I. Homeownership and Rental Housing**
- II. Arts, Culture and Heritage**
- III. Business and Job Development**
- IV. Quality of Life**

## **I. Homeownership and Rental Housing**

### **Homeownership and Rental Housing Guiding Principles:**

- A. Support new lower density housing,
- B. Rehabilitate existing housing and build compatible infill housing,
- C. Provide a variety of housing types for all ages, family sizes and incomes,
- D. Use high quality designs and materials, and
- E. Support existing homeowners.



**Conceptual Elevation View - Residential**  
FOR THE CITY OF ALBANY - ARBOR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

### **Key Homeownership and Rental Housing Actions:**

1. The Albany Community Development Agency in partnership with the Albany Housing Authority and housing providers is finalizing a plan which:
  - a.) Renovates existing and builds new housing in clusters throughout the neighborhood by leveraging publicly-owned property.
  - b.) Strives for an equal ratio of homeownership to rental housing.
  - c.) Targets abandoned buildings for rehabilitation and selective demolition.
  - d.) Controls density with an average of two housing units per lot.
  - e.) Provides for and integrates market-rate and subsidized housing opportunities.
  - f.) Works with homeowners and renters to form support networks.
  - g.) Serves the needs of modern families by providing amenities such as off-street parking.
  - h.) Supports the re-opening of the former Robin Day care Center.





2. Implement an initiative to reduce the number of abandoned properties.
  - a.) Launch pilot program in cooperation with Albany County to return abandoned buildings and lots to productive use. In this program, the County would transfer abandoned properties to the City. The City would then solicit developers and individuals who have interest in rehabilitating these properties through a request for proposals process. Proposals would be evaluated based on compliance with the guiding principles and the applicant's experience and financial capacity to complete the proposed development.
  - b.) Work with the Enterprise Foundation to develop a strategy and entity focused on acquiring, rehabilitating and/or demolishing abandoned properties citywide.
  - c.) Continue efforts to create more homeowners through the services of the Albany Home Store and other programs.
3. Seek financial incentives for property owners to rehabilitate their properties, e.g. through support of the pending NY State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, municipal programs such as the Residential-Commercial Urban exemption and 421f Residential Improvement exemption.

## II. Arts, Culture and Heritage

### Arts, Culture and Heritage Guiding Principles:

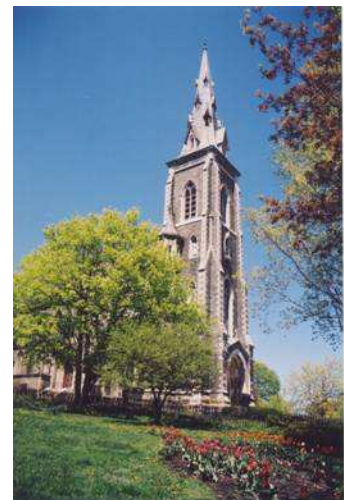
- A. Preserve the historic integrity of the neighborhood by maximizing the use of historic buildings.
- B. Support cultural institutions' applications for grant funding within or about Arbor Hill.
- C. Promote Arbor Hill as a place for arts, culture and heritage, recognizing the neighborhood's rich history, including the African-American experience.
  - i. Encourage the expansion of arts, culture and heritage activities.
  - ii. Attract future development related to arts, culture and heritage.
- D. Expand public participation in the arts through:
  - i. Strengthening neighborhood ties to city and regional arts & cultural organizations and institutions.
  - ii. Increasing opportunities for neighborhood youth and adults to participate in arts and culture programs.
  - iii. Promoting the neighborhood as a regional arts center and place of historic significance.



**Mural painted by local artists  
Andyouth in 2002, N. Swan St**

### Key Arts, Culture and Heritage Actions:

- 1. Support the use of historic buildings where possible, namely:
  - a.) St. Joseph's Church/41 N. Ten Broeck St.
  - b.) St. Joseph's School, N. Swan St.
  - c.) Salvation Army Building, Clinton Ave.
  - d.) The King Building, 27-29 N. Swan St.
  - e.) Holy Innocents Church, N. Pearl St.
- 2. Support ongoing Underground Railroad research and other research pertaining to the African-American experience in Arbor Hill.
- 3. Create an Arbor Hill Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee comprised of neighborhood and citywide institutions and cultural organizations to build ties between Arbor Hill and citywide artistic, cultural, and heritage organizations.
- 4. Support new library services in Arbor Hill.

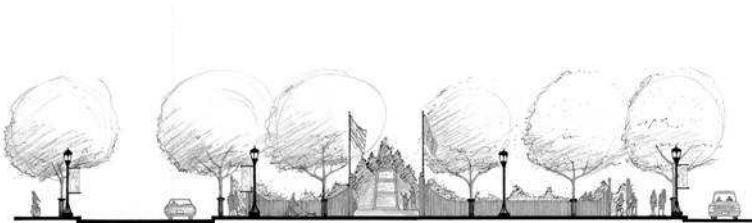


**St Joseph's Church**

### III. Business and Job Development

#### Business and Job Development Guiding Principles:

- A. Support Henry Johnson Boulevard and Clinton Avenue as the neighborhood's primary commercial corridors.
- B. Promote the growth of quality small businesses, which serve and employ neighborhood residents.
- C. Support the development of marketable retail sites.
- D. Build upon the emerging cluster of ethnic restaurants and grocers.
- E. Make streetscape and other enhancements to improve the image of Arbor Hill's commercial corridors



Elevation view of a potential neighborhood gateway at Henry Johnson Boulevard (left), and potential Whitney Young Medical Center pharmacy site (right).

#### Key Business and Job Development Actions:

- 1. Hold small business development workshops to encourage the growth of existing businesses and improve communication amongst them.
- 2. Expand the Empire Zone to include more Arbor Hill properties.
- 3. Support the opening of a SEFCU branch in Arbor Hill.
- 4. Support the Chinatown Plaza proposal on N. Pearl Street.
- 5. Support the Whitney Young Medical Center's efforts to acquire the Urban League Building for use as a neighborhood pharmacy.
- 6. Market strategic commercial sites on Henry Johnson Boulevard and Clinton Avenue.
- 7. Establish neighborhood gateways on Henry Johnson Boulevard at Livingston and Sheridan Avenues.





## IV. QualityofLife

### QualityofLifeGuidingPrinciples:

- A. Foster understanding, cooperation and trust between the community and the police department to improve public safety.
- B. Make physical improvements to enhance public safety.
- C. Support efforts to clean and beautify Arbor Hill.
- D. Improve existing and develop new neighborhood greenspaces.
- E. Calm traffic and make other improvements to make Arbor Hill more pedestrian-friendly.
- F. Give priority for on-street parking to residents, particularly where off-street parking options do not exist.
- G. Encourage stronger physical connection to the downtown.



### Key Quality of Life Actions:

1. Establish a Quality of Life Committee comprised of police officers and members of the Arbor Hill neighborhood to work cooperatively and creatively to improve living conditions in Arbor Hill.
2. Make lighting improvements and clear vegetation in problem areas.
3. Encourage the efforts of neighborhood residents, organizations and churches to clean and beautify Arbor Hill.
4. Continue code enforcement activities.
5. Support efforts to light St. Joseph's Church.
6. Remediate brownfield sites in Arbor Hill.
7. Consider siting options for a New Covenant Charter School playground.
8. Investigate improvements to traffic flow and pedestrian circulation on Henry Johnson Boulevard.
9. Support a residential parking permit system.



## Implementation

The Arbor Hill neighborhood planning process was initiated with the specific goal of reaching consensus on a housing strategy for the neighborhood, using a \$5 million HOPE IV award. However, there was also a larger goal, to find ways to better leverage existing resources to help revitalize the neighborhood.



Strategies for new housing.



Strategies for rehabilitation.

As a result of the planning process, a housing strategy was developed which not only responds to objections to the previous Swan Street proposal but also leverages the federal funding to help address other neighborhood problems such as the blighting influence of abandoned properties, the desire for more yard space and off-street parking, and the need for neighborhood daycares services. In addition, four areas of focus were identified, outlining the priorities of the neighborhood. The principles developed in each area provide a basis for evaluating new development proposals in the neighborhood. **Further exploration of the four focus areas revealed that the neighborhood is rich in human resources, but they need to be better coordinated and their services better communicated, to maximize their use by the community.**

### Implementation goals:

- ⇒ Continued emphasis on the plan's four areas of focus, and
- ⇒ Provision of different opportunities for involvement, and networking with other individuals and organizations working in the same field.



Implementation will involve evaluation of development opportunities

Accordingly, implementation of the neighborhood plan will be guided by three independent, yet interrelated bodies. The primary responsibility for implementing the plan will lie with the subcommittees for the plan's four focus areas. These subcommittees will meet as needed to carry out their respective actions and evaluate development opportunities for consistency with the principles. Participation in these subcommittees will be open to all interested parties.

Representatives from each of the subcommittees will attend monthly coordination meetings to share progress. A larger Friends of Arbor Hill

organization will be established that will hold periodic meetings and provide a forum for interested parties to share progress, and provide additional networking and information sharing opportunities for the stakeholders of Arbor Hill.